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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001427

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2018
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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN MFA OFFICIALS SAY ALGIERS AGREEMENT NEAR
DEATH

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1367

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reason: 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY. United Nations in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Head of Office Joseph Stephanides told PolOff and visiting Eritrea Desk Officer on May 15 that Ethiopian State Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu told Stephanides on May 15 that Ethiopia insists that Eritrea must demilitarize the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and UNMEE return fully to the TSZ or Ethiopia will adopt a "clean slate" strategy and consider the Algiers Agreement finished. According to Stephanides, Tekeda said that otherwise Ethiopia would go back to square one and deal with Eritrea from a position of strength, solving their border dispute at some point in the future when there is a new government in Eritrea. In a separate meeting on May 15, Ethiopian MFA senior lawyer Minelik Alemu told Embassy Officers that Ethiopia will consider the Algiers Agreement to be finally dead if/once UNMEE is terminated by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Minelik said Ethiopia "has nothing to lose" without the Algiers Agreement and that the status quo along the border would continue with no war. He also said Ethiopia would consider a follow on United Nations observer mission only if it was established independently of the Algiers Cessation of Hostilities Agreements. In the event of Ethiopia's withdrawal from the Algiers Agreement process, Minelik clarified to EmbOffs, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission's (EEBC) April 2002 delimitation determination would remain valid. END SUMMARY.

TEKEDA TELLS UNMEE ETHIOPIA MOVING TO "CLEAN SLATE" STRATEGY

12. (C/NF) Stephanides on May 15 relayed the substance of a conversation he had with Tekeda over lunch earlier in the day. According to Stephanides, Tekeda made the following points:

-The Ethiopian position was that either the situation returns to the status quo ante, i.e. full return of UNMEE and re-establishment of the TSZ, or Ethiopia will adopt a "clean slate" strategy. Clean slate means no Algiers Agreement, no demarcation decision and back to square one. Ethiopia will deal with Eritrea from a "position of strength," and when the time is right the two countries (presumably when there is a

new government in Asmara) will resolve their differences by another mechanism. By going to the clean slate concept, Tekeda said, Meles wins with the Tigrayans by finally disengaging from a process they, the Tigrayan elite, despise.

-Ethiopia,s Washington lawyers are drawing up the papers for Ethiopia,s withdrawal from the Algiers Agreement continuing from their September 24, 2007 letter to the UNSC stating that Eritrea was in "material breach" of the Algiers Agreement.

-Ethiopia can sell demarcation to its constituents, but Ethiopia does not believe Eritrea is serious about normalization and believes Eritrea prefers that the status quo continue to justify President Isaias, policies.

-Tekeda was "taken to the woodshed" by Meles and Seyoum for suggesting that Ethiopia make a positive gesture to the UNSC (REF).

¶3. (C/NF) In a separate conversation with PolOff on May 20, Stephanides said Tekeda told him that the authority for a follow on UN observer mission should be the UNSC's general responsibility for peace and security rather than the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement or the Algiers Agreement. Stephanides said the Ethiopians are angry with UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guehenno for his remarks during the April 22 briefing to the UNSC where Guehenno said that both parties were responsible for the current impasse and angry because of Guehenno's perceived support for the EEBC's demarcation by geographic coordinates decision. Tekeda also told

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Stephanides that the Ethiopian government distrusts Acting/Special Representative of the Secretary General (A/SRSG) Azouz Ennifar because they think he shares Guehenno's support for the EEBC decision. According to Stephanides, Ennifar recently asked the Ethiopian government whether they would support Ennifar's leadership of a follow-on mission, but the Ethiopian government gave a noncommittal response.

MFA LAWYER SAYS UNMEE'S TERMINATION IS END OF ALGIERS

¶4. (C/NF) In a separate meeting on May 15, Ethiopian MFA senior lawyer Minelik Alemu told Embassy Officers that UNMEE's termination by the UNSC would signal the end of the Algiers Agreement. He said that the Algiers Agreement cannot exist without UNMEE and the TSZ. When pressed on what would that mean for the border and the EEBC, he said that the delimitation decision would continue to stand, but that the demarcation decision would not. He said that the status quo would continue along the border--no war--and that Ethiopia "has nothing to lose" with the end of Algiers. With the end of Algiers, a new mechanism will be needed for demarcation. He said that the situation and the Algiers Agreement would be "frozen" to be reopened at a later date, probably when there is a new government in Asmara.

¶5. (C/NF) Minelik said that Ethiopia would consider a new observer mission on the Ethiopian side of the border, but this would have to happen outside and independent of the Algiers Agreement and require new negotiations with Ethiopia over the scope and mandate of the force, i.e. what the force would observe. There must also be concurrent condemnation of Eritrea over its treatment of UNMEE. He said the idea of liaison offices in Addis Ababa and Asmara was "silly," and that "if we want to talk to New York, we can call them."

COMMENT

¶6. (C/NF) Tekeda's comments to Stephanides are largely

consistent with Tekeda's discussion with the Ambassador on May 17 (Reftel). Post assesses, however, that the claim that Ethiopia's Washington lawyers are drawing up papers to withdraw from the Algiers process is likely more a bluff than Tekeda knew would be reported to UNSC members as they deliberate on UNMEE's future. Minelik's comments probably are suggestive of the Ethiopian government's next steps in that they may not withdraw from the Algiers Agreement outright, but rather simply state that Eritrea's expulsion of UNMEE and militarization of the TSZ and the UNSC's termination of UNMEE have rendered the Algiers Agreement abrogated and therefore dead. Although apparently willing to accept a new observer mission only on the Ethiopian side of the border, it is abundantly clear that they will reject it if it is linked to the Algiers Agreement. Minelik's comment that Ethiopia would continue to support the EEBC delimitation decision is significant in that it leaves some basis for future resolution of the border demarcation issue, without a complete return to square one, if Ethiopia follows its apparent course and assuming that Eritrea is willing to discuss demarcation concurrent with normalization. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO